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Force Planning Assumptions: New Assumptions -- New Forces

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The rapid demise of the Soviet threat has called into question the need for the United States to plan and size its military force structure requirements based upon specifically identifies threats to national security interests. However, not everyone agrees that military forces can be properly sized without using a realistic and credible notion of the threat as a framework. The debate revolves around two contending views. One postulates that specific threat-based planning is essential, for it leads to a more objective measure of how much is enough for the protection of US vital interests.¹ The second postulates that in today's world and the rapidly changing strategic environment there are really no clear threats to US interests other than the unknown and the uncertain. Thus military forces must be prepared to respond to unanticipated crises.² While each is a valid argument for force planning purposes they both are, in many respects, backward looking in that the prime driver is the historical knowledge of where we were -- the wars we have already fought and the surprises of unpreparedness -- not where we are going. It is therefore, possible to suggest yet a third approach to force planning that is more forward looking and tied more directly to the US view of the future world and US long-range objectives.

¹ Les Aspin, "National Security in the 1990s: Defining a New Basis for U.S. Military Forces", before the Atlantic Council of the United States, January 6, 1992, p. 6.

² General Colin L. Powell, Statement before the Committee on Armed Forces, United States Senate, January 31, 1992.

In the following, each method of force planning will be described and analyzed in terms of their underlying assumptions. This will be followed by an assessment of the implications the third approach has for critical areas such as force size and structure, (to include nuclear weapons), the research and development base, mobilization capabilities, force readiness, and the industrial base.

Prior to the collapse of the former Soviet Union the US had a single threat against which it could plan its military requirements. While there might have been a great deal of national insecurity due to the military capabilities of the former Soviet Union, the Soviets did provide a single global enemy who was not only threatening but was militarily competitive in weapons developments and force generation and modernization. The former Soviet Union also posed a significant global threat in that there was a global competition between two conflicting political ideologies -- communism and democratic capitalism. Within the global struggle regional crises were considered manageable with a portion of the forces developed and deployed to meet the global threat -- if the US was not involved in a global war. With the collapse of the Warsaw Pact, the fractionation of the former Soviet Union, and the bankruptcy of communist ideology US defense planners have been trying to identify other likely threats upon which to size force requirements as well as to justify defense expenditures.

By the time that the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union were disintegrating US defense planners had made the transition away from focusing on a single global threat to considering multiple major regional threat scenarios that may or may not occur simultaneously or sequentially. These major regional threats had validity for they focused on southwest and northeast Asia -- where the US has vital security interests and treaty obligations. However, as the new planning assumptions were being adopted two events undermined their credibility. First, the war in the Persian Gulf significantly reduced the only threat in the region that would potentially require a large deployment of US forces. Second, North and South Korea undertook political initiatives that promise an end to their thirty-two year struggle to unite the peninsula -- this time by peaceful means. While not yet a reality, the prospects are good. This has now called into question the North Korean threat as a viable planning assumption.

THREAT BASED

In response to these developments the Department of Defense has been trying to divest itself of specific threat-based planning assumptions. The Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, however, still believes that force planning needs to be based upon specifically identifiable threats for two reasons:

First, no other approach to force planning tells you how much is enough. Top-down planning -- what they are practicing in the Pentagon as they take successive cuts out of the budget -- will leave us with a smaller

version of the force we built for the Cold War. If the force is not built from the bottom up on a clear threat assessment, then there is no way of knowing whether it's the right size or the right kind for the new era.

Second, what citizens look for from their national security establishment is protection of their vital interests against things they perceive as threatening to them. In this era of belt tightening, our citizens understandably may be reluctant to pay for defense unless there is a clear linkage between the forces and the threats those forces are designed to deal with.³

This building block methodology recognizes the need to clearly identify threats to US interests that would cause the nation to use its military forces. Thus it surveys US interests worldwide ranging from the residual threat from Russia to US vital interests in the Middle East, Southwest Asia, North Korea and the possibility of lesser conflicts elsewhere where contingency operations might occur. In addition it identified situations where the US might employ military forces. For example forces might be used to counter terrorism, assist in drug interdiction operations, for peace keeping, disaster relief and combating the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Of the list of possible uses of force regional threats were deemed the most demanding.

In part based on its recency the methodology establishes Iraq as the benchmark threat to establish a baseline against

³ Les Aspin, "An Approach to Sizing American Conventional Forces for the Post-Soviet Era: Four Illustrative Options", news release, February 25, 1992, pp. 2-3.

which other threats are equated and evaluated. To simplify the problem of force building requirements the methodology uses a computer model to establish a quantitative estimate of the relative capabilities of different weapon systems in order to construct a combat potential profile of the arsenals of potential threats.⁴ In this force building methodology Iraq's pre-Desert Storm military arsenal is established as base "1" against which the arsenals of other potential threats are evaluated -- for example Syria is .6 and China is 1.4.⁵

In recognition that the forces alone will not necessarily achieve the objective of protecting US interests, the methodology performs the next logical step by asking three key questions: how many of these events are likely to occur; how long must the forces be sustained in the field; and, how fast do they have to get there?⁶ The answer to the first question will have an impact on the size of the force, for if only one event were to occur then the total force could be much smaller than that required to meet two or more major regional contingencies. How long they must remain in the field will also determine force size in that deployed troops engaged in a protracted crisis/combat situation will have to be rotated at some period of time or they will lose their fighting edge. Finally, how fast they will have to get

⁴ Ibid; p. 11.

⁵ Ibid; p. 11.

⁶ Ibid; pp. 18 -19.

there will not only determine the size of the deploying force, but also the lift method. For example, if a small force deployed early will deter or defeat a mobilizing enemy then a substantial airlift capability will be required. Conversely, if large, heavily armored forces are needed quickly then fast sea lift capabilities are needed. Although both options will be driven by the opposing threat's military capability, they demonstrate the need to consider additional factors such as the support structure which is required to move and sustain the forces.

When the building block approach was applied to developing a new force structure a number of force options needed to be considered. First, however it was necessary to establish a foundation upon which to build the force. The methodology established a defense foundation composed of strategic nuclear forces, forces for the defense of the United States, an overseas presence, research and development for force modernization, training, special forces and a military industrial base. Upon this base four options were postulated. The first started with a limited requirement to defend against a Desert Storm equivalent threat, plus a humanitarian assistance operation, and the lift capability to achieve the objective. The second option added a second major regional contingency where US forces might be employed, taking into consideration the additional lift that would be required. The third option added more forces for long-term deployment to enable troop rotation as well as the

possibility that a lesser regional contingency might erupt. The final option considered additional requirements for humanitarian assistance, greater lift and more robust contingency forces.⁷

In analyzing the above threat-based approach to defense planning in the post Cold War era one would first be struck by the "bottom up" way of planning. Simply stated, political guidance regarding vital national security interests are only implicitly considered. Perhaps its major shortcoming is that it tends to be divorced from national security objectives. It assumes that regional wars are more likely in the post Cold War era since there is less risk of escalation to global war. Implied in this assumption is that the US will become involved in these wars and will use military force. It further assumes that the next war in some region outside the US will be similar to that of the Persian Gulf and, therefore, the Gulf war is the prototype for future wars. Finally, in only one case, access to Gulf oil, was a vital national interest identified. The methodology did not specifically identify other US vital interests, rather assumed their existence. This lack of specificity is contrary to the methodology's basic assumption that "...it is critical to identify threats to US interests that are sufficiently important that Americans would consider the use of force to secure them."⁸ Regardless to build a force

⁷ Ibid; pp. 20 -21.

⁸ Aspin, op. cit., p. 6.

structure on these assumptions would at the least be foolhardy. In addition the approach is more backward looking than the "capabilities based" method its proponents criticized. While the Pentagon's force planning may look like a down sized version of the Cold War force structure, it at least recognizes, or assumes that the future is uncertain and that a robust force is necessary to meet unanticipated contingencies. The threat-based bottom up approach seems to have started with one vital national security interest and then tried to invent threats or situations for which a more robust force structure would be required.

By using a minimum force approach for a regional contingency involving a specific vital interest the methodology sets itself up for attack from critics who could say that a minimum force is all that is necessary to deal with events outside the United States. The fact that the methodology did not identify other specific vital interests could cause critics to question the need for additional forces. They could further say that the existence of much larger forces for commitment to an overseas operation would only make the use of force more likely. Critics would therefore argue that not having the forces for adventures overseas is preferable to committing US forces unnecessarily. In the final analysis the threat-based bottom up methodology assumes that the American public will also identify US vital national interests in the same way as that identified by their "national security establishment".

CAPABILITIES BASED

In contrast to threat-based bottom up planning against specific threats the Department of Defense recognizes that there are no clearly identifiable threats such as that posed by the former Soviet Union. It therefore has adopted an adaptive planning process oriented toward multiple options for an array of uncertain crises that could potentially affect US vital global interests.⁹ This has led to adopting a planning process based on multiple regional scenarios in which threats are generic, but not necessarily country specific. While recognizing that there are no clear threats, let alone a single threat, the multiple regional scenario based planning process envisions a number of regions in which the US has vital interests where forces might be used. It is unfortunate that in February of 1992 the scenarios became public knowledge when they appeared in the New York Times.¹⁰ While they were intended only as illustrative scenarios in which US forces might be employed, their public disclosure had the negative effect of making them appear to be the Defense Department's planning assumptions about where future crises will erupt and where US forces will be committed. However, since they appeared in the Defense Planning Guidance their intended use will never be appreciated fully by people outside the Defense Department.

⁹ National Military of the United States, U.S. Government Printing Office, January 1992, p. 12.

¹⁰ Patrick E. Tyler, "7 Hypothetical Conflicts Foreseen by the Pentagon", New York Times, February 17, 1992, p. 8.

Regardless of the public disclosure of the planning guidance, the Department of Defense developed a military force structure identified as the "Base Force". As articulated by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff the base force was designed to achieve the fundamental objective of deterring aggression against the United States and, should deterrence fail, to defend the nations's vital interests. Not unlike the threat-based planning process this military force planning strategy is built upon four foundations: strategic deterrence and defense, forward presence, crisis response and reconstitution. The full details of each of the components have been presented in Congressional testimony by the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.¹¹

In contrast to the specific threat-based approach to force planning the base force concept takes into consideration US national security objectives. It considered potential threats to US interests around the world and the necessity to protect and defend those interests. It also recognized that there must be a coherence to the force structure in that the forces must be maintained at a minimum level necessary to support US interests. Finally it recognized that planning had to be flexible to adapt to a rapidly changing international environment.

¹¹ Dick Cheney, Statement before the Senate Armed Services Committee in Connection with the FY 1993 Budget for the Department of Defense, January 31, 1992 and Powell, op. cit.

While these are positive attributes of adaptive planning the process is susceptible to the influence of political considerations. First the planning process is driven as much by political pressures for force reductions -- the so called "peace dividend" -- as it is by an attempt to balance the interests of the military services to preserve their slice of the defense budget. What this means is the planning process reflects more the impact of the political struggle between the Department of Defense and the Congress, and interservice rivals for a fair share of the budget, than the attainment of national security objectives. In particular, strategic deterrence and defense are noble aims but it is not clear as to who or what is to be deterred. For the near term the Commonwealth of Independent States still maintains a sizable nuclear arsenal but the question is does it need to be deterred? Are the weapons a direct threat to the United States? Nor is it clear that a rouge state, such as Iraq, would be deterred by the US nuclear arsenal from using a nuclear weapon if it possessed one. In the current state of affairs it is becoming increasingly difficult to justify large US strategic nuclear forces solely on the existence of nuclear missiles in the arsenal of a former superpower competitor. The US concept of strategic nuclear deterrence based on superpower competition needs to be reexamined. Deterrence as a planning factor for force structure sizing and weapons development must also be reexamined.

Forward presence is also questionable in that when the US maintained a national strategy of containing communist expansion forward presence provided for rapid response to a crisis involving the primary threat -- the Soviet Union. In an age where the primary threat has, in essence, gone away, the questions become who are we trying protect, from whom, and who are trying to deter from doing what? Forward presence reflects more the US view of an unstable world situation in which regional crises can erupt at any time than it does the views of the nations we think we are protecting. They may view the world as more peaceful and stable than we do and come to view our presence as inimical to stability.

The capability to respond appropriately to a regional crisis which affects our vital interests is a valid planning factor as long as we know and clearly articulate what our vital interests are. The examples provided the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff state that the US was unprepared for the Korean war and was ill-equipped for the Vietnam war. While these are true statements the planning assumption of the necessity to maintain force structure and readiness to reduce surprise based upon these two events is not necessarily valid. Specifically, in the immediate post WWII period the US did not want to get involved in a potential war on the Asian landmass, let alone with China, and did not view the Korean peninsula as vital to US interests. In June 1950 the US

reversed its position and committed its troops that were, by many accounts, ill-prepared to deal with the conflict. Similarly, Vietnam was also a war for which US forces were not prepared for the type of conflict that was waged. This was in part due to the feeling that the US would not again get involved in a war in Asia as well as the existence of defense planning assumptions that were oriented toward a major conflict with the Warsaw Pact in central Europe. The combination of looking toward the primary threat in Europe and the unlikelihood of a war in Asia did not prepare US forces for the ten years of war in Vietnam. In both cases neither were considered vital to US interests and thus military plans were not formulated prior to the conflicts. Also, both were political wars that restrained the full and complete application of military force. The reversal of national policy and political restrictions placed on the use of force are not things that can be planned in advance.

Finally, reconstitution as a foundation for defense planning also has shortcomings. While it is intended to deal with the ability of the nation to generate a significant force to deal with the emergence of a global threat it appears to ignore its own planning assumption that the next war will be a "come as you are war". While not a fundamental contradiction, if the nation plans to respond to regional crises with the forces at hand, and the size of the future force structure is anticipate to be smaller than it is today, then one can logically anticipate that

the military industrial base will also be smaller compared today. Whereas the nation should have adequate numbers of people that could be mobilized in a crisis, the likelihood that the nation could maintain a warm military industrial base is problematic. Without a large military force that requires a significant amount of equipment a number of defense industries are likely to switch their production lines to commercial goods. In addition the increasing internationalization of economic business indicates that many sectors of the US military industrial base may be foreign owned. As long as the US is prepared for a "come as you are war" such ownership is insignificant. If, however, the US is trying to regenerate and mobilize its industrial base to meet a growing global threat then foreign ownership of US industries could be a significant impediment.

In the final analysis both threat based planning and capabilities based planning have their merits. Both attempt to deal with the difficult problem of how to size US forces to meet national security requirements in a rapidly changing world. Both are interested in ensuring that US national security objectives can be achieved and that the nation is preserved in tact. They both recognize that the future is uncertain and that people or nations hostile to US interests exist throughout the world. Both, however, are only incremental changes from the way defense planning was done in the past. They both rely on the history of where we were and not on where we want to be. Both are still

reflective of a Cold War superpower competition for dominance in world affairs. They both, in this authors view, ignore the opportunity to take advantage of the significant changes that have occurred in the world and to raise the issue of where as a nation does the US want to be in 10 to 20 years. If this could be determined then the next logical question is what are we vulnerable to in getting there. This type of questioning leads to the third approach for defense planning.

VULNERABILITY BASED

Vulnerability based planning would first start with a review of the national security strategy. It would not necessarily change the objectives, rather evaluate their validity in light of the global changes that have occurred. Next the review could identify where the US is vulnerable to the achievement of stated objectives. Where vulnerabilities exist the review process would ensure that the missions assigned to the military are valid and executable. Defense planning assumptions could then be developed to redress the vulnerabilities. Alternatively, changes to the policy objective could also be made to reduce reliance on defense as the means to achieve the objectives.

To illustrate how this review process might work the following will list US interests and objectives in the 1990's as presented in the National Security Strategy of the United States.

The survival of the United States as a free and independent nation, with its fundamental values and its institutions and people secure.

The United States seeks, whenever possible in concert with its allies, to:

- deter any aggression that could threaten the security of the United States and its allies and -- should deterrence fail -- repel or defeat military attack and end conflict on terms favorable to the United States, its interests and its allies;

- effectively counter threats to the security of the United States and its citizens and interests short of armed conflict, including the threat of international terrorism;

- improve stability by pursuing equitable and verifiable arms control agreements, modernizing our strategic deterrent, developing systems capable of defending against limited ballistic-missile strikes, and enhancing appropriate conventional capabilities;

- promote democratic change in the Soviet Union, while maintaining firm policies that discourage any temptation to new quests for military advantage;

- foster restraint in global military spending and discourage military adventurism;

- prevent the transfer of militarily critical technologies and resources to hostile countries or groups, especially the spread of chemical, biological and nuclear weapons and associated high-technology means of delivery; and

- reduce the flow of illegal drugs into the United States by encouraging reduction in foreign production, combatting international traffickers and reducing demand at home.

A healthy and growing US economy to ensure opportunity for individual prosperity and resources for national endeavors at home and abroad.

National security and economic strength are indivisible. We seek to:

- promote a strong, prosperous and competitive US economy;

ensure access for foreign markets, energy, mineral resources, the oceans and space;

promote an open and expanding international economic system, based on market principles, with minimal distortions to trade and investment, stable currencies, and broadly respected rules for managing and resolving economic disputes; and

achieve cooperative international solutions to key environmental challenges, assuring the sustainability and environmental security of the planet as well as growth and opportunity for all.

Healthy, cooperative and politically vigorous relations with allies and friendly nations.

To build and sustain such relationships, we seek to:

strengthen and enlarge the commonwealth of free nations that share a commitment to democracy and individual rights;

establish a more balanced partnership with our allies and a greater sharing of global leadership and responsibilities;

strengthen international institutions like the United Nations to make them more effective in promoting peace, world order and political, economic and social progress;

support Western Europe's historic march toward greater economic and political unity, including a European security identity within the Atlantic Alliance, and nurture a closer relationship between the United States and the European Community; and

work with our North Atlantic allies to help develop the process of the Conference of Security and Cooperation in Europe to bring about reconciliation, security and democracy in a Europe whole and free.

A stable and secure world, where political and economic freedom, human rights and democratic institutions flourish.

Our interests are best served in a world in which democracy and its ideals are widespread and secure. We seek to:

maintain stable regional military balances to deter those powers that might seek regional dominance;

promote diplomatic solutions to regional disputes;

promote the growth of free, democratic political institutions as the surest guarantor of both human rights and economic and social progress;

aid in combatting threats to democratic institutions from aggression, coercion, insurgencies, subversion, terrorism and illicit drug trafficking; and

support aid, trade and investment policies that promote economic development and social and political progress.¹²

In reading through the list it is apparent that US interests and objectives for the 1990's are not significantly different than they were in the 1980's. Indeed one might state that the interests and objectives preserve the status quo. The biggest change between the decades, however, has been the collapse of the Soviet Union. The demise of the Soviet Union and the corresponding threat should enable the US to undertake significant reductions in defense expenditures and the size of its military forces. However, in pursuit of US national security strategy the military has played a major role and since the strategy for the 1990's is not significantly different the role of the military could also remain prominent.

Perhaps now is the time for the US to reassess its security objectives in which the military has heretofore had a prominent role. In so doing it might be possible for the military to

¹² National Security Strategy of the United States, The White House, U.S. Government Printing Office, August 1991, pp. 3 - 4.

reduce its requirements in support of national objectives and more narrowly focus its responsibilities. A few examples of reassessing objectives are, therefore, warranted.

While no one would question the primary role of the military to defend the territory of the US and to help maintain the integrity and values of the nation the question becomes what other missions are valid. The use of the military to combat drugs, fight terrorism and provide humanitarian assistance are all questionable. On the one hand, if these issues are truly national vulnerabilities that threaten national values and institutions, then perhaps there is a valid mission for the military. Formulating plans to deal with these issues, however, will be similar to planning against random events. On the other hand, in the war on drugs the military is providing limited support in the form of reconnaissance assets and intelligence. While this is a use of existing assets developed during the Cold War, today it is questionable whether the results achieved thus far are worth the expenses. While it might be easy to justify expenditures from the defense budget to combat drugs, it is doubtful that the drug war mission is a solid planning factor for building a force structure. The fight against terrorists raises a similar question about the validity of the mission. While it is true that military forces were used to bomb Libya, the aircraft were originally designed to attack the Soviet Union. Again it is doubtful that an anti-terrorist mission is a sound

planning factor upon which to build a force. Similarly, humanitarian assistance is not a mission that is planned for, nor one that can justify large expenditures for airlift. In all three cases there are alternatives to the military that can perform the same mission and achieve the same objectives -- these are not missions for the US military. As such they can easily be deleted as a military requirement.

In a similar fashion a national objective is to ensure access to foreign markets, energy, mineral resources, the oceans and space. A review of this objective reveals that the military has a major role to play. Indeed, the Gulf war was fought in part to ensure the US access to oil at a reasonable price. If, however, the US changed its dependency on Gulf oil by finding alternative sources, increasing efficiency and energy conservation, or found alternatives to oil such as electric cars, solar energy for generating electricity or some other combination of alternatives, then US vital interests in Southwest Asia would be greatly reduced. As such there would be no need to build forces to counter aggression that threatens US access to oil. Thus US vulnerability would be reduced. If no viable alternatives exist or can be developed then military force is need to reduce the US vulnerability.

A final example is in pursuit of a more stable world the US is interested in maintaining a stable regional military balance

of power to deter aggression. This requirement leads to a continued forward presence and a continued commitment to seven collective defense treaties (North Atlantic Treaty; ANZUS Treaty; Philippine Treaty; Southeast Asia Treaty; Japanese Treaty; Republic of Korea Treaty; and, Rio Treaty). These treaties are all a product of the Cold War and the pursuit of a containment strategy. They were put in place to reduce US and allied vulnerabilities to communist aggression. Now, however, is the time to review the need for these treaties and the need for US forces to be forward deployed. If the treaties are still valid then they should be honored. If not, then they should be done away with.

To put this line of reasoning in perspective it does not consider the political feasibility. While it might be possible to initiate a comprehensive review of the national security strategy, the likelihood of fundamental changes would encounter a number of "sacred cows" and "pet rocks". In addition, the line of reasoning does not specifically deal with but is aware of the time factor. To bring about a reduction in vulnerabilities by seeking alternative sources of energy will not only be a political struggle but could take a great deal of time. However, if a comprehensive review could be undertaken that results in long-term fundamental changes to US national strategy, then national defense planning requirements could be more clearly articulated. This would enable defense planners a long-term

series of goals against which plans could more realistically be developed. It would also enable more rational force structure planning and more efficient use of defense resources. Absent this type of long-term strategy defense will only make incremental changes to a smaller force and will come under increasing political pressure from Congress as it tries to exercise its influence over the defense budget.

The implications this vulnerability based planning would have on fundamental areas critical to defense will be determined primarily by national security strategy. If there is no fundamental changes in US strategy then threat or capability based planning methods are perhaps sufficient to determine military requirements. If, however, the national strategy is altered and the military is required to reduce strategic vulnerabilities, then a different force structure and capability could emerge. In the area of conventional force structure the reduction of US dependency on oil from Southwest Asia will result in a much smaller force for the need to have a heavy force to meet regional threats will have been eliminated. The elimination of old treaty obligations will also reduce the need for US forces to be forward deployed and will contribute to a demand for a smaller force. Until there emerges a hostile nation with a large, modern nuclear arsenal with intercontinental missiles, US vulnerability has been greatly reduced. US concepts of strategic deterrence and the rationale for a robust US based strategic

defense are no longer valid. Until the US develops a new strategic nuclear policy, modernization of nuclear forces will continue to be challenged.

One area that could prosper from vulnerability based planning is military research and development. With a smaller force that may not be forward deployed the US will have to seek greater returns from modern technologies. More rapid methods of transportation, greater lethality, better communications, miniaturization and transportability are all areas where improvements might have to be made. Improvements in these areas will have a direct effect on the ability of military forces to mobilize and deploy. These developments will also have implications for readiness, training and military doctrine.

While vulnerability based planning may mean a smaller force structure, it should result in one that is better equipped, more lethal through the incorporation of highly advanced technologies and one that is ready, highly trained and rapidly transportable. Vulnerability based planning, however, will do little for the US military industrial base. The reduced requirements will gradually cause the military industrial base to transition to the production of commercial goods. Few industries will find it profitable to manufacture equipment that is not dual use. This will, in the long run, mean that the US military industrial base will likely be internationalized and the ability of the nation to

reconstitute a large arsenal of democracy will not exist.